

7. THE BURMESE WILD DOG AND OTHER MATTERS CANINE

In the *Journal* of December 1949, under Col. Phythian-Adams's 'Jungle Memories' and his interesting accounts of wild dogs, etc., he has left open a query as to the existence of a grey wild dog in Burma.

I spent 10 years in that country previous to the Jap invasion in 1942 and never heard of a grey species of wild dog there (the Burmese name 'tawkhway' merely alluding to wild dogs generally). But, in June 1936, while after bison and saing in the Lower Chindwin District, I saw an animal which, I can only suggest, could have been none other than a grey wild dog.

I was moving camp at the time and, as it was raining—also to protect it from the joltings of the cart—had, unfortunately, rolled up my rifle in my valise and was myself sitting at the back of the cart because of the deep mire on the track. The light was dull and visibility was further obscured by the swirling drizzle.

What I saw on this occasion I, at first, idly regarded as the charred stump of a tree, having a curious resemblance to a large dark-grey dog sitting erect on its haunches and facing the direction from which we had come. At the moment I noticed it, it was about 10 yards away on an open bit of ground beside the track, but must have been half that distance off when the cart came abreast of it. A few moments later, a slight twitch of the head and of a laid-back ear towards the cart moving out of its field of vision revealed it clearly as an animal with a black muzzle and half-shut eyes, having a dark-grey coat—the hair plastered streakily and blackly wet down its flank. Neither of the Burmese in the cart had noticed it, and the wind must have been 'right' for it with respect to the bullocks.

Larger than a jackal (excepting an oversized rabid one I had killed in Mespot) and larger than the average village pariah of Burma, I mentally exclaimed 'Wolf!'—immediately realizing the inaccessibility of my rifle; while my revolver, in a haversack, was just beyond easy reach and I feared that any movement to get at it would alarm the animal, whatever it was—and I was convinced that it was a wolf. So when, about 30 yards further on, the cart rounded a bend, I secured the revolver and carefully began to stalk back. Unfortunately, however, my Burmese servant elected to get down too and, in spite of my urgent gestures, the driver stopped his bullocks; so that when I came into view of the spot the animal was not there. Recollecting then that I had seen a few thamin deer not far from the track and about 100 yards further along, and supposing that, perhaps, this 'wolf' had been aware of them and was operating with a mate to stalk them, I proceeded in that direction, but the thamin too had disappeared. I should add that there was not a village within miles and, I am sure, no domestic dog would have found reason to be there in that weather and to maintain such immobility during the passing of the cart. On returning from that trip I looked up all available literature but found no reference to the wolf in Burma. Nor, in his 'A Game-Book for Burma' had E. H. Peacock (former Game Warden) mentioned it—both the Indian and Malayan wild dog were stated to exist in Burma, but he admitted that he had never seen the former (a larger and heavier animal than the

latter). I eventually came to the conclusion that the 'wolf' I had seen must have been an uncommon species of wild dog peculiar to Burma; as far as I could gather, the Burmese have no name for wolf.

The writer of 'Jungle Memories' concludes his discussion of wild dogs by cautiously citing an instance of 'a variety of wild dog in the Karen Hills . . . black and white, as hairy as a Skye terrier and as large as a medium spaniel'; and, though he seems to invite corroboration, if not zoological discussion of the existence of such a species in the wild state (and, impliedly, restricted to Karenni—the western border of which runs with a part of Burma proper and the northern bulges into the Southern Shan States), or at least leaves the question open, it is with much diffidence that I approach it to say that I have seen a pack of, what I mentally noted at the time as 'piebald' wild dogs. Wild they certainly were, in the sense of feral; but, whether anatomically identifiable with *Cuon*, I haven't the slightest knowledge wherewith to suggest. But, many years ago, I was once invited to a shoot in the Lakhimpur-Kheri District, along both banks of the Sarda River, with two elephants and usually a large gang of beaters—beating through dense and extremely high 'narkal' grass for swamp deer, while hoping to put up tiger or panther. One morning, as my elephant was approaching a large clear space in the grass, pig began to break back—one boar carrying away a strip of cloth off a beater alongside—making my mount nervous and fidgety. So then, seeing another large boar crossing my front towards beaters on the left, I was trying to get a bead on him when I heard my host call out 'Don't shoot—only wild dogs!' and, the next moment, my mahout pointed and said 'Kutha'. Then, on the far side of the clearing, to the left and just outside the shadow of the grass beyond, I saw about a dozen piebald ('black' and 'white'—some with more 'white' than 'black') dogs leisurely getting up and retiring into the grass. Before my elephant reached the open ground, not many strides ahead, the pack had disappeared. But in that brief period I must have noted nearly every one of them—at a distance of under 100 yards—and, though the morning sun was somewhat in my eyes, the whole pack was in bright sunlight to one side when sighted (obviously basking—a cold January morning) and, excepting the indeterminable colour of their dark markings, the dogs were clearly seen; and I retain an impression of a certain similarity in the build of all, probably due to inbreeding—which must, naturally, result in such uniformity, as well as in established habits and thus creating, what may be termed, a 'variety' of the species. A few, smaller than the rest, probably were young dogs. I hesitate to venture a more detailed description, but I seem to remember noting that the last few dogs to disappear bore a general chow-like appearance, or similar to the 'bhootia' dog of the Himalayas (—the Nepal hills lay visible to the north—) and I think these carried bushy tails, high and curled up.

During the noon halt, my host seemed disinclined to discuss these dogs or to explain why he had told me not to shoot at them, merely remarking that they were well known in that neighbourhood—as also were some 'wild cattle'—and that he had seen them on some previous occasions but that, personally, he 'had no time for them'. Conscious

of being only a guest and rather out of my element in that terrain and in that method of hunting, I did not pursue the topic further. It would have been sufficiently interesting to have been able to discover whether these were merely domestic dogs 'gone wild'—or descendants of such—for I have never heard of that occurring in India; and it may be noted that the pigs mentioned must have been basking too, in the same open patch!

As to whether jackals sometimes mate with domestic dogs, I once shot a jackal while in the act. It happened in S. W. Kurdistan and the bitch slowly came about half a mile from the camp to meet the jack which, till then, had been skulking amongst some bushes. I was carrying a '303 Service rifle and had been waiting for the jackal to show himself, so immediately took the opportunity when he emerged to meet the dog. The incident was preceded by the usual courtship behaviour of dogs. Incidentally, once near the Tigris I was fortunate to be able to shoot a jackal while actually uttering the 'pheel' cry. He was sitting erect at the time in a patch of scrub and did not seem to have noticed my approach on my pony, though the rest of the pack had and was beginning to move away. Though it was dusk the range was only about 30 yards and I was able to shoot him without dismounting. I think that was the only time I ever heard the 'pheel' cry out there; and the cause of it seems obscure, for mounted men—especially Arabs—must have been a common sight to those jackals.

'WALMER',
LOVEDALE,
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8. OCCURRENCE OF THE CHESTNUT-BELLIED NUTHATCH (*SITTA CASTANEIVENTRIS CASTANEIVENTRIS*) IN SIND—A CORRECTION

Among papers in the Society's office we found a folder containing 131 typewritten sheets of bird notes which can be traced to the late Mr. T. R. Bell as they are in a peculiar type and correspond with notes on interleaved pages in books bought from Mr. Bells' library. The text also supports this in many ways.

In one part he refers to *Sitta castaneiventris*—the Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch as under:—

'I saw a single specimen of this little nuthatch in a babul-grove in Raoti forest in Upper Sind on the 24th of January 1905. I have never seen many of them anywhere in the Presidency even. This one was alone and feeding and was very shy, dodging behind the trunk and branches. But I am sure it was this very species.'

In another place he says:

'it might have been *Sitta tephronota* which is said to be common in Baluchistan.'